

Partnerships Refined: The Partnership Development Program

In response to the need for greater competency in natural resource management partnerships, the Forest Service's Partnership Task Force employed the Pinchot Institute to take the lead in designing a Partnership Development Program. Comprised of a team of six Forest Service employees appointed to a six-month detail, which ended December 1, 2002, the Partnership Task Force help foster an organizational culture that cultivates and expands the agency's capacity for partnerships. Though only one component of this overall effort, the Partnership Development Program, as envisioned by the Task Force, is intended to be a useful and available tool to agency personnel and outside parties that have an interest in partnering with the Forest Service.

In the first of this two-phase project, the Pinchot Institute conducted interviews with noted practitioners, trainers, and academics to: (1) define the core skill-set program managers and partnership specialists need who are responsible for advancing solutions to natural resource management by using collaboration and partnerships; (2) catalogue existing training opportunities related to the development of these skills; (3) explore the cultural, procedural, and skill-related barriers to advancing collaborative solutions; and (4) identify some of the more promising, and perhaps necessary, approaches to developing competency in partnerships and collaborative stewardship.

Those interviewed were asked to identify the skills they believe are essential to an individual's effective participation in partnerships, particularly those involving the Forest Service. In general, the skills identified fell into

the following categories:

- ✿ relationship building
- ✿ understanding communities
- ✿ facilitation/mediation
- ✿ the business side of partnerships (i.e., grants and agreements)
- ✿ monitoring.

Though the interviewees were not asked to identify skills according to these specific categories, these categories emerged organically, thus indicating their importance to establishing and maintaining effective partnerships.

Overall, it appears that the core skills the interviewees identified could be developed through the rich array of training courses currently offered by industry, universities and colleges, and government agencies. Many of these training sources can provide customized or off-the-shelf courses, both of which can be particularly helpful. In addition to the Pinchot Institute's October, 2001 report to the agency, "Collaborative Stewardship Training Opportunities," which offers an in-depth review of notable sources, there are other training sources on the market that are geared toward collaborative natural resource and public lands management.

With so many resources available, the challenge is providing timely training that is integrated with real, collaborative problem solving activities. Training should be made available to those in need when the time is ripe for outside intervention. The fact that this is not occurring reflects an issue with administrative processes

and procurement, rather than a lack of training sources.

Based upon the wealth of knowledge amassed through the expert interviews and related written materials, we outlined a model for the Partnership Development Program that is to be further articulated in Phase II of this project. Aspects include utilizing new and existing training opportunities, such as a reliable, internal mentoring program that allows those in need to learn directly from those with successful experience. Furthermore, Phase II will also fully describe the components of a comprehensive program, which will be designed to develop competencies in the skill areas outlined in Phase I.

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